

~~SIGN AND~~ METHOD FOR MARKETING GOODS AND SERVICES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/225,224 filed on August 14, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

As a general practice, sellers post "For Sale" signs as an inexpensive means of informing consumers that a particular good or service is for sale. Though inexpensive, such signs have achieved varying and unpredictable success as marketing tools. A major disadvantage to this form of advertising is that consumers typically want to inspect the good or service for sale before deciding whether or not to purchase. Therefore, traditional "For Sale" signs depend upon passers-by to either take the time upon seeing the sign to further investigate the good or service for sale, or make a mental note to return and investigate later.

Unfortunately, passers-by are always on their way somewhere and often cannot take time to stop and investigate upon seeing a "For Sale" sign. Further, mental notes are too often recalled either at a time when the consumer cannot return to investigate the good or service, or when he has become disinclined to do so because of inconvenience.

Traditional "For Sale" signs have addressed this problem by indicating a phone number that a potential purchaser may call for more information. Unfortunately, many consumers are hesitant to speak to sellers for fear of a pushy salesperson's pitch. In addition, many consumers wish to preserve their anonymity while gathering information.

Consequently, there is a need in the art for a method of "For Sale" sign advertising that provides consumers an easy and convenient means of investigating a good or service on

1 their own time. Preferably, such a method would enable  
2 consumers to anonymously investigate a good or service using a  
3 personal computer at any time the consumer finds convenient.

#### 4 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 A method for marketing a good comprising the steps of (a)  
6 providing a sign, said sign having a preprinted website  
7 address, a space for a unique identifier, and an indication  
8 that a good is for sale, and (b) providing a website at said  
9 website address, said website being adapted to permit a seller  
10 to post on said website under said unique identifier  
11 information about said good, said website being further  
12 adapted to permit a prospective purchaser to view said  
13 information. A sign for sale of a good is also disclosed.

#### 14 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 Fig. 1 is an "AUTO FOR SALE" sign according to a first  
16 embodiment of the present invention.

17 Fig. 2 is an "AUTO FOR SALE" sign according to a second  
18 embodiment of the present invention.

19 Fig. 3 is an instruction sheet for use with a sign  
20 according to the invention

#### 21 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED

#### 22 EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

23 As used herein and in the appended claims, "good" or  
24 "goods" means any tangible or intangible good, or any service,  
25 that is or could be offered for sale by a seller using the  
26 marketing method of the present invention. For example, the  
27 good can be a house, apartment, car, trailer, furniture, boat,  
28 real estate, factory, airplane, etc. The method of the ✓  
29 present invention comprises the steps of providing a sign with  
30 an indication that a good is for sale (such as a sign that  
31 says "FOR SALE"), and a website where sellers can input or ✓

1 post information about the good which is subsequently  
2 available to consumers.

3 Referring to Fig. 1, a sign is provided listing a good ✓  
4 for sale, and a preprinted website address at which a consumer  
5 can obtain information about the good using a unique  
6 identifier, such as a unique identification number, according  
7 to a first preferred embodiment of the invention. Though the  
8 sign of Fig. 1 is for an "AUTO FOR SALE", other goods and  
9 services can be marketed using a sign according to the  
10 invention as shown in Fig. 1, including "VEHICLE FOR SALE",  
11 "HOUSE FOR SALE", "FOR SALE", "FOR RENT", "GARAGE SALE", etc.

12 Figs. 1 and 2 show the website address preprinted on the  
13 sign, that is, when the purchaser purchases the sign from a  
14 store such as K-Mart, the website address has already been ✓  
15 printed on the sign by the manufacturer.

16 The sign comprises a sign substrate which can be made of  
17 any suitable material, preferably a hard plastic, or any other  
18 known material capable of withstanding the elements. The sign  
19 can be provided listing a particular good for sale preprinted  
20 on one face thereof, for example a car. In this embodiment, a  
21 multitude of signs according to the present invention are }  
22 provided for sellers, with various types of goods preprinted  
23 thereupon. Alternatively, a generic sign according to the  
24 present invention can be provided with a blank space where the  
25 seller must fill in a description of the good for sale  
26 himself. Having purchased the sign and filled in the  
27 necessary information, a seller would then post the sign in a  
28 conspicuous place to attract consumer attention as generally  
29 known in the art, such as a front lawn, car window, etc.

30 Referring to Fig. 2, and according to a second preferred  
31 embodiment of the present invention, the sign can be provided  
32 with spaces for the seller to list a telephone number, email  
33 address, or other direct or personal contact information for  
34 those consumers who wish to contact the seller directly in

1 addition to visiting the website.

2 Whether according to the first or second embodiment, a  
3 sign according to the invention displays a unique identifier  
4 which consumers can use to locate information relevant to the  
5 good for sale at the indicated website. Preferably, the  
6 unique identifier is a sequence of numbers, letters, or  
7 numbers and letters, preferably at least 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6  
8 characters in length. The sign can be provided with a blank  
9 space (see for example Fig. 1) for the seller to fill in a  
10 unique identifier corresponding to the good on the website.

11 ✓ In this embodiment, the seller, after purchasing the sign *afw*  
12 (such as shown in Fig. 1), would log onto the website, input  
13 or post information pertaining to his good for sale (such as  
14 type of good, condition, price, location, how to contact  
15 seller, etc.), and receive a unique identifier, such as a ✓  
16 unique identification number, from the website which he would  
17 then enter or provide in the appropriate space on the sign.  
18 In this embodiment the website provides the unique identifier  
19 to the seller in connection with the seller posting the  
20 information on the website. The sign of Fig. 2 can also be  
21 used for this embodiment, except that the identification ✓  
22 number is not preprinted.

23 Alternatively, the sign can be provided with the unique  
24 identifier already imprinted or preprinted thereon (see Fig.  
25 2). In this embodiment the seller is prompted to activate the (   
26 unique identifier preprinted on the sign when he logs onto the  
27 website to input the information about the good for sale.  
28 Whether the unique identifier is provided with the sign, or is  
29 provided by the website for the seller to print on the sign,  
30 consumers would access the information input by the seller  
31 relevant to a particular good via reference to its unique  
32 identifier. It will be observed in all the cases described  
33 above that the website permits the seller to post on the  
34 website under the unique identifier information about the ✓

1 good. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the only  
2 cost to the seller is the cost of purchasing the sign; there  
3 is no charge for the listing or the other website services.  
4 Less preferably, the seller can be charged a fee in connection  
5 with the posting of the information and/or the sale of the  
6 good.

7 In addition to the above information, the sign optionally ✓  
8 can be provided with additional specific instructions for  
9 consumers. For example, a sign according to the invention can  
10 recite, "For more information visit [www.sharpcar.com](http://www.sharpcar.com) and enter  
11 the following identification number: 123456." (See Fig. 2).  
12 The sign is typically provided for purchase at retail stores  
13 such as WalMart, K-Mart, Meijer, pharmacies, superstores, drug  
14 stores, grocery stores, hardware stores, discount stores, or  
15 any other retail store, and is preferably supplied with  
16 instructions detailing how the seller can log onto the website  
17 and enter information regarding the good for sale.  
18 Preferably, the instructions are provided on an instruction  
19 sheet as shown in Fig. 3. Most preferably, the instructions  
20 are printed on the reverse side of the sign. Less preferably,  
21 the instructions can be provided on a separate sheet. ✓

22 A website according to the invention is also provided,  
23 preferably by the company producing and distributing the  
24 signs, and is designed such that the seller, having purchased ✓  
25 the sign and following the accompanying directions, can log  
26 onto the website where he is prompted to enter certain  
27 information regarding the good for sale (e.g. age, condition,  
28 price, etc.) as well as his contact information. Such  
29 information is then accessible to consumers who see the sign  
30 and visit the website indicated on the sign. The website  
31 prompts consumers to enter the unique identifier or  
32 identification number indicated on the sign to view the  
33 information pertaining to a particular good which the consumer  
34 saw advertised by the sign. The website also provides the ✓

1 consumer with personal contact information (such as phone  
2 number and e-mail address) of the seller so the purchaser can  
3 contact the seller and arrange to consummate the transaction,  
4 including paying the purchase price and picking up the good.

5 In addition to allowing consumers to view information  
6 specific to a particular good by reference to its unique  
7 identifier, the website can also be advantageously adapted to  
8 allow consumers to browse all available goods within a  
9 particular category (i.e., autos, boats, guns, computers,  
10 furniture, houses, etc.) and/or by geographic location (such  
11 as by zip code number). A website adapted in this manner has  
12 a principal advantage that it does not require consumers to  
13 recall the unique identifier on a sign which they have  
14 previously seen. Instead, having seen a sign advertising a  
15 car, for example, a consumer could log onto the website and  
16 browse the list of cars for sale within the geographic region  
17 encompassing the location where the consumer saw the sign  
18 until he found the car he saw. It will be understood that a  
19 hurried consumer will be far more likely to remember a catchy,  
20 intuitive website address, e.g. "www.sharpcar.com", than a  
21 random sequence of letters or numbers.

22 Another principal advantage of a website adapted in this  
23 manner is that the website owner can further promote the sale  
24 of goods advertised thereon to consumers-at-large who have not  
25 seen a "FOR SALE" sign, and therefore could not be led to the  
26 website thereby. To this end, the website can be promoted to  
27 the general consuming public via online, television, radio,  
28 billboard, or print advertising, leafleting, mass mailing, or  
29 via some other known promotional means. Optionally, the  
30 website owner can charge a fee for this additional service.  
31 For example, the website owner can charge a fee to the seller  
32 of the good, the purchaser, or both. Subsequently, a consumer  
33 who heard about the website via some means other than an  
34 invented sign, could log onto the website and browse the list

1 of goods in a particular category and geographic location in  
2 search of the particular good he seeks to purchase.

3 The sign can have a description of the good (i.e.,  
4 "AUTO") preprinted thereon. The sign and website marketing  
5 system of the present invention could be used by sellers to  
6 market a virtually infinite array of goods and services, a  
7 partial list of which follows. The following list is by way  
8 of illustration only, and not limitation: "For Sale", "For  
9 Sale By Owner", airplanes, antiques, apartments, houses or  
10 rooms for rent or sale, appliances, automobiles, banquet and  
11 party services, bicycles, boats, carpet cleaning services,  
12 clothing, computers, electronics, employment services, estate  
13 sales, furniture, garage sales, guns, house cleaning services,  
14 house sales, jewelry, labor-for-hire services, landscaping  
15 services, laundry services, makeup, musician services,  
16 motorcycles, small business services and advertising, and  
17 tutoring services.

18 A marketing system according to the invention represents  
19 a unique development in the marketing field because it  
20 uniquely links a consumer product (the "For Sale" sign)  
21 directly to an e-commerce transaction. Other consumer  
22 products, i.e. food, pharmaceuticals, textiles, etc., do not  
23 link the retailer, the consumer or the product directly to an  
24 internet transaction. By directing consumers to an internet  
25 website to obtain information regarding (and perhaps purchase)  
26 a particular good for sale, the sign of the present invention  
27 directly facilitates an e-commerce transaction.

28 Optionally, the sign is provided with a container such as  
29 a cylindrical tube (for example a Take One Tube as known in  
30 the art) into which the seller can deposit a sheet of paper  
31 such as a paper flyer containing information about the good  
32 for sale. In this embodiment, a consumer can take a flyer to  
33 get information about the good for sale immediately upon  
34 seeing the sign. The flyers may contain the same or different

1 information as posted on the website. The cylinder or  
2 container can be made of opaque or transparent material,  
3 preferably plastic, and preferably has waterproof endcaps to  
4 protect the paper contents from the elements. The cylinder or  
5 container is preferably attachable to the sign by means of  
6 tie-downs, hose-clamps or the like.

7       Once a consumer decides to purchase the good indicated on  
8 the sign, the consumer contacts the seller via the indicated  
9 contact information and the transaction is consummated by any  
10 known means that is acceptable to both the buyer and the  
11 seller, such as arranging to pay the purchase price and pick  
12 up the good. Payment can be made directly to the seller or  
13 the seller's agent. Alternatively, the website can be adapted  
14 such that the transaction is consummated online whereby the  
15 provider of the website receives payment from the buyer, for  
16 example by credit card, and then forwards payment to the  
17 seller. Optionally, the website provider can deduct a fee,  
18 such as a commission, for this service.

19       Although the hereinabove described embodiments of the  
20 invention constitute the preferred embodiments, it should be  
21 understood that modifications can be made thereto without  
22 departing from the scope of the invention as set forth in the  
23 appended claims.